

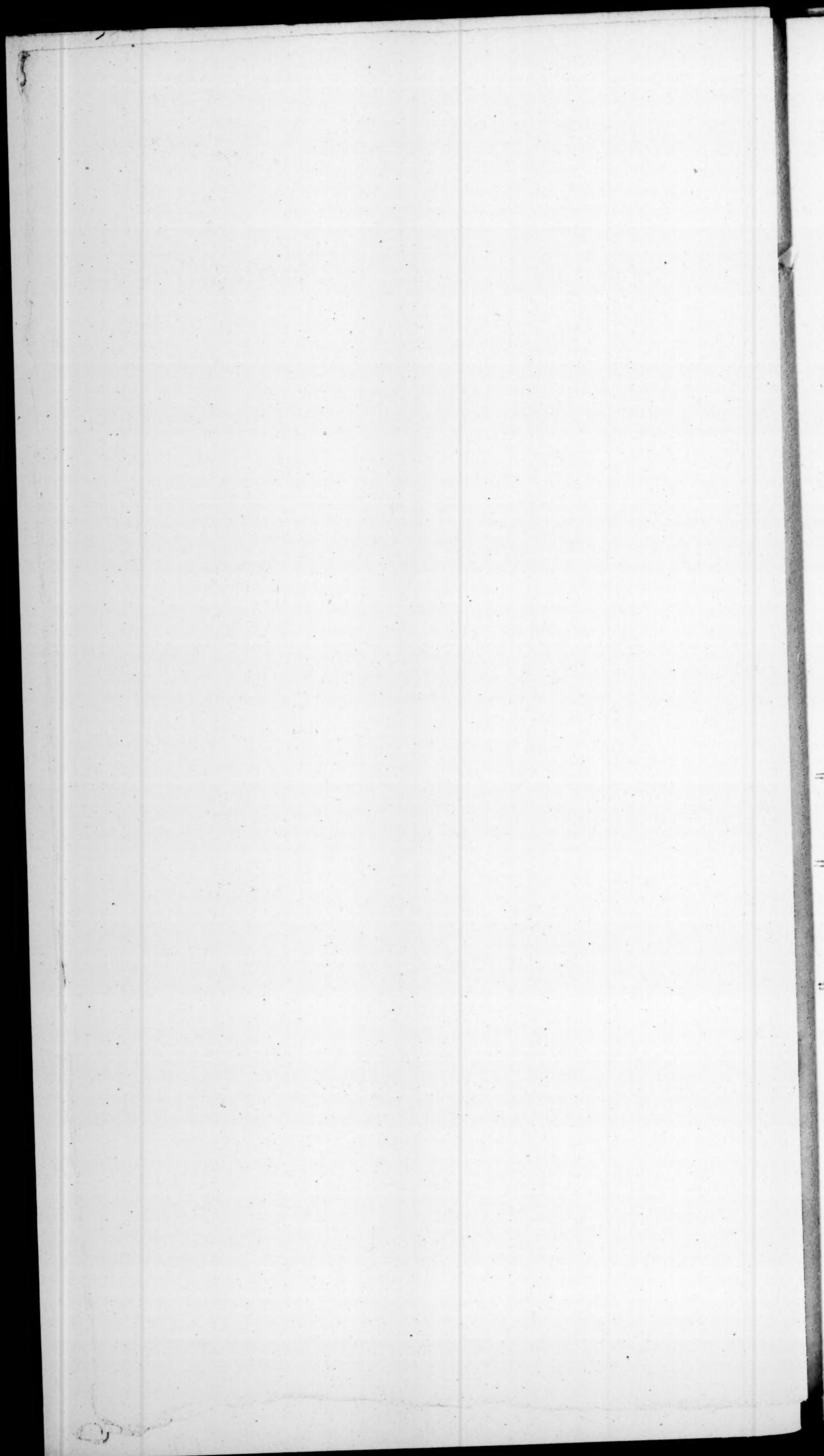
Discriminator

1790

THE

APOTHECARY'S MIRROR.





THE
APOTHECARY'S MIRROR;
OR,
THE PRESENT STATE
OF
PHARMACY EXPLODED;

IN A LETTER TO

J. H. SEQUEIRA, M. D.

AND LICENTIATE OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF
PHYSICIANS IN LONDON.

BY *DISCRIMINATOR.*

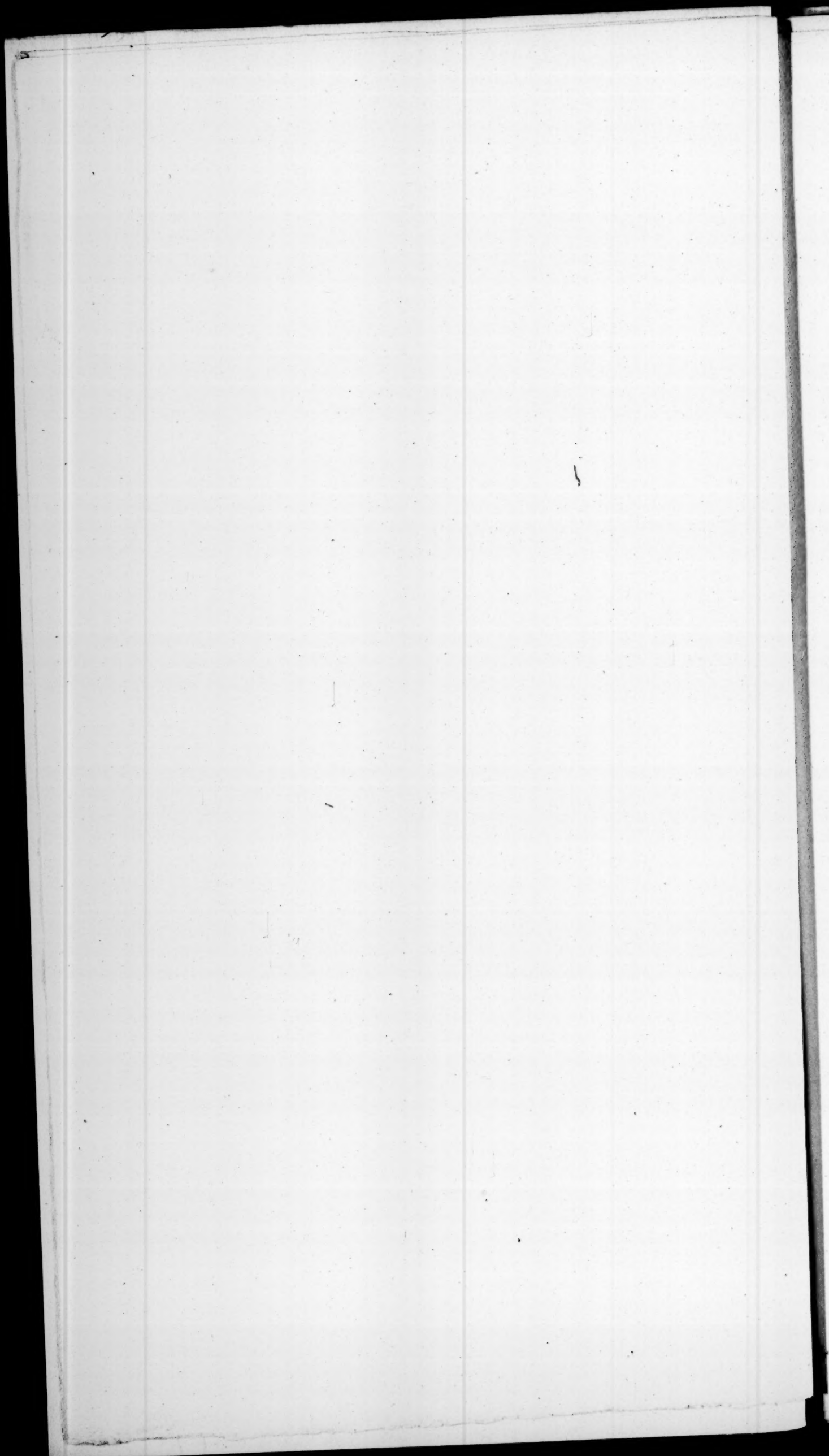
NON EST VIVERE SED VALERE VITA.

MARTIAL.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY C. MACRAE.

1790.



TO

J. H. SEQUEIRA, M. D.

AND LICENTIATE OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE
OF PHYSICIANS IN LONDON.

DEAR SIR,

THE friendship with which you have invariably honored me, ever since the commencement of my medical career, demands my most grateful and sincere acknowledgments ;--- which I now take an opportunity of offering thus publicly : as likewise to declare the very high respect I entertain for your great abilities. These needed not my notice, as they are sufficiently evinced to the world by your very extensive and successful practice ; neither are your social qualifications less deserving of public eulogy—they are, indeed, such as gain you the most exalted place in the esteem of every one who has the

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happiness of knowing you. It is my most ardent wish, that you may long enjoy the general and deserved acclamation of applause, with that inward satisfaction which is ever the inseparable and natural attendant of high mental attainments, when joined with the possession of every noble virtue. Fully impressed with the strongest ideas of your wisdom and candor, I have taken the liberty of addressing this Letter to you.

After many years close attention to study, I find, that the most intense application is scarcely sufficient to acquire a proficiency in Physic; yet every day brings forward some one who imagines himself possessed of abilities, adequate to the cure of the most inveterate and intricate maladies. Those who submit the care of their healths to the guidance of these up-starts, are certainly highly blameable for indiscretion, while happily there are so many opportunities of procuring the advice of those, whose abilities have passed the
ordeal

ordeal of critical examination, and are approved.

I should think an enforcement of the laws which confine the practice of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery to those whose qualifications have stood the test of examination, and have proved themselves capacitated to exercise the art they particularly profess, would be highly serviceable to the nation. It is evident, that while those Parliamentary Statutes are suffered to lie dormant, the whole practice of every branch of the Healing Art will be gradually drawn from those, in whom alone a legal authority is invested.

Perhaps, Sir, there is no Profession, Art, or Science, more universally invaded than that which you so ably exercise, particularly by the Apothecaries, the major part of whom, I am convinced, are by no means qualified for the conscientious discharge of the task which they

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undertake:

undertake : nay, many of them are scarcely able to transact that business which their name implies, the compounding of medicines according to the prescriptions.

The very great increase of Apothecaries within late years, I have long viewed as a serious evil, not only from their ignorant practice, but likewise from the great exactions with which they oppress their patients. I imagine, that if the expedient which Prince Avicen, the Physician, employed to try the abilities of a number of Apothecaries who followed him on an expedition, was tried on these men in London, it would be a means of lessening their number : it was simply thus—He wrote some unintelligible characters on a paper, and interspersed them with names of different drugs, so as to give the writing the appearance of a prescription ; this he sent round to the different Apothecaries to be compounded, which all but two or three promised to do, most
exactly

exactly and faithfully, with the best drugs ; upon which, he ordered them all to be turned out, and only retained those few who were possessed of integrity sufficient to declare they did not understand it.

Notwithstanding what I have here advanced in general terms, I am well convinced that there are many Gentlemen who practise Pharmacy, whose abilities are deserving of the warmest respect ; but then, they are those whose erudite attainments have gained them admission either into the College of Physicians, or the Corporation of Surgeons. The proofs I could adduce in support of what I have asserted, respecting their ignorance and exactions, are numberless, and even of insincerity in the compounding of medicines. I would willingly confine myself to the reprehension of their ill practices in general, without pointing at any particular person, having no other view in my intentions than a reformation

formation of the abuse, and not to stigmatize any particular individual for practices, which, I much fear, are become too general. The excuse of the universality of such procedures among the Apothecaries, is a plea we might readily admit as a palliative to the enormity of the abuses they have already committed, provided they would not continue them; but it so happens, that most of the Apothecaries have been brought up to see these enormities practised without reprobation; and unfortunately most men are very ready not only to connive at, but even follow an ill precedent, when it is productive of gain. The salvo of "every one does it," seems generally to be considered as a sufficient excuse for dispensing with the strictness of their duty; and they, as is too often the practice, rest contented with the reputation of being possessed of an equal share of integrity with others who are engaged in the same pursuits. Indeed I am rather apprehensive that a general reprehension

hension would not by any means be adequate to the reformation desired; for while all the individuals are covered from the reproach, they will confess the charge as to some, without discriminating, while every one severally will deny and continue the practice. I shall, therefore, prove the charges upon some few, and endeavour to convince their Patients how they are imposed upon.

The men whom I shall now bring forward are of that class, who are always speaking confidently and impertinently on subjects they do not understand, in the most cramp words, which they hope others are as little informed by, as they mean; and think, by puzzling the people, they sufficiently demonstrate their own learning. By this means it is, that many really suppose them to be proficient in the art of which they usurp the practice. The man most conspicuous for this mode of conduct is Mr. Daniel Dis-

he

he is constantly endeavouring to affix the most complicated and unintelligible names to the mildest complaints: thus, upon his being asked some little time since, what was the particular nature of the complaint of a young lady whom he attended? He very pompously announced it, to be a malignant erysipelatous inflammatory fever! when it was merely some trifling symptoms of pyrexia; and what he denominated erysipelas, was a cutaneous eruption, with which the lady had been affected for some months.

A lady, somewhat above three months advanced in pregnancy, and being much troubled with the *fluor albus*, requested Mr. Di——s's advice, as likewise to be informed of the nature of her disorder:—she had previously acquainted him of her being pregnant. He defined it to be *an obstruction of the womb!* and for which he prescribed fifteen grains of the compound powder of myrrh, every four hours! This medicine

cine was continued nearly a week, at the expiration of which time, she had a most alarming miscarriage.

Long as I have detained you with this consummate fool, I must crave your attention to one more proof of his knowledge, which in my opinion “out-does all his former outdoings :” I then will make you acquainted with others of the same rank.—A lady afflicted with laborious parturition, had recourse to the assistance of Mr. Y——g, an eminent Surgeon and expert Accoucheur ; he prescribed for her some draughts consisting of equal parts of myrrh and borax, with pennyroyal water. This prescription was sent to Mr. D——s’s shop to be compounded ; when the borax not being at hand, he ordered his Apprentice to substitute *burnt allum!*—This the Apprentice, more judicious than his Master, delicately refused. Mr. D——s also constantly substituted one or other of the cin-

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nabars

nabars for kermes mineral. I shall not, dear Sir, comment on these circumstances, nor trouble you with any farther proofs of this man's ignorance, having, I think, already fully shewn *that*, by the communication of the above facts.

I shall now, dear Sir, desire your attention, while I exhibit two other Characters: Mr. Az—ly and Mr. Shan--n, his partner. The former of these gentlemen is what the world call “an experienced Apothecary:” of his scientific endowments I shall not say any thing, but leave Impartiality to judge of them, when the subsequent specimens are perused. Mr. Az——ly is in the habit of using the Cold Bath: on his being questioned concerning the effect it had upon him, the answer was—he found it very serviceable, as it *embraced* him very much!

A gentleman very subject to the gout, felt himself much indisposed, but not finding such
symptoms

symptoms as usually preceded the attack, he was fearful of some other complaint. To calm his fears, he sent for Mr. Az——ly, who desired him not to be alarmed, as there were no symptoms of any other disorder but the gout. After this the discourse turned on indifferent subjects: on a sudden, Mr. Az——ly started from his chair with the alarming interjection of “Ha! there it is! there it is!”—“What, and where?” was the question from the whole company.—“The gout, the gout,”—he replied—“I see it in the urine which stands on the drawers!”—

A professional gentleman meeting accidentally with Mr. Az——ly, asked him if there was any medical news.—No; only putrid fevers are very *brief* about. This answer giving the gentleman some idea of Mr. A——ly’s abilities, he was desirous of questioning him still further; he therefore told Mr. Az——ly that the putrid fever was a disease much talked of, but, that he

had never yet heard, or read it unequivocally defined; he therefore would thank him for his definition. After some little demur,—Mr. Az——ly said, he did not positively know, but he always understood, that, the term putrid fever, was universally accepted, to convey the idea of a — pu—trid fever!

That such ignorance should have a patronised footing in the world, is the strongest though silent censure on his employers' discernment that is possible to be bestowed. The above gentleman's partner has but recently commenced Practitioner, upon the firm basis of that knowledge which he has acquired behind his learned master (Mr. Az——ly's) counter, and from the proof which he has already given of his profound abilities, we can easily perceive how closely he has followed his master.

A gentleman was attacked with some symptoms

toms of paralysis ; and on Mr. Shan-n being questioned concerning the nature of the complaint, he said it was a most alarming *antispasmodic* disorder ; when, on its being suggested to him that “anti” might be omitted with the strictest propriety, he contended so violently for the elegance of the expression, that at once evinced his pedantry, ignorance, and self-conceit.

I much fear I have already been too diffuse on these illiterate pretenders, but still I cannot let pass the opportunity of exhibiting one more to the public view, who for his ignorance, insolence, and arrogance, has scarcely a parallel. Every syllable he utters impresses his hearers with the strongest ideas of his confidence, and leaves them no room to doubt but that he thinks himself entitled to adopt this line,

“ Inventum medicina meum est,”

for his motto. How far this Gentleman, Mr.

Pa---c---fco,

Pa--c--fco, is qualified to practise, I will leave you to judge by the outlines of his education. From a public school, where he had learnt to write and read, he was apprenticed to a person of respectable character and abilities, but in little practice ; the first two or three years were passed in pulverizing the different drugs, and running errands. Having acquired these *fundamental principles of Physic*, he began to distinguish one drug from another, and was even employed to compound the few prescriptions which were sent to the shop. Thus passed his time, till the conclusion of his apprenticeship, when shortly after, on the demise of his master, he announced himself a Practitioner ! Excellently qualified, no doubt !

To avoid prolixity, I will merely add, that the education of the generality of Apothecaries is nearly the same, with this difference, that some of them gain a little knowledge of the Latin or Greek, and sometimes both, prior to their becoming

coming Apprentices, which they almost invariably forget when their times are expired.

Having made good the charge of ignorance, and insincerity in the compounding of medicines, it is necessary that I prove their exactions. This is a circumstance, I believe, generally known, and particularly to those who are in possession of Apothecaries bills: indeed, to prove it on individuals, would be an Herculean labour, and no way satisfactory; suffice it to say, that the charges are in general forty or fifty per cent. too high! I shall forbear giving particular instances, hoping that this concealed reprehension will awaken some principles of justice in those, who must feel the truth of what I have here asserted, to guide them in their future conduct. I would also advise those who have large and increasing families, to check themselves in time, for should a developement of their mal-practices once take place, it must unavoidably be their ruin.

You

You have, my dear Sir, I make no doubt, frequently observed, that many people are inclined to favor the pretences of the Apothecaries, and upon this foundation, that an Apothecary, who has made up different Physicians or Surgeons prescriptions, for patients, and has observed their operations and effects, may administer such medicines as have been effectual to other patients in similar cases, without consulting either Physician or Surgeon. Those who argue thus, should be told, that there are very few Apothecaries who are capable of making such observations, and if they were, they seldom have the opportunity. The knowledge they may gain by compounding Physicians prescriptions, and by the observations which they can make, is strictly this, they may see what medicines are commonly given in fevers, what in consumptions, and what in dropsies, &c. but then, will any unprejudiced person conclude, that, from these observations, they can judge with due accuracy of these

these diseases, or their different causes, or their methods of cure? There is no general remedy, or method for any one disease; different medicines, and different methods must be used in different subjects, though the malady in itself be the same; therefore, no man can possibly be a proper judge, but who is minutely acquainted with all the various parts of physic; and as the law is not employed to restrain these men from practising, let their undeniable ignorance, which I have here brought to view, keep all those who value their lives, healths, or fortunes, from trusting to their skill. Instances are not wanting, where, from an improper application of medicines, people have been defrauded of their lives, as well as their money; and by the administration of deleterious or ineffectual drugs, have heightened or protracted the disease, to the preclusion of effectual assistance. Then it is that Apothecaries call in a Physician (perhaps one of their own) that the harrassed patient

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may

may make his exit from this world *secundum artem*.

As it is likely the term, "one of their own Physicians," may not be generally understood, I will here explain it. There are some Physicians, who, in order to acquire the Apothecaries favor, prescribe most profusely for their patients. No wonder then that those who suffer their pens to run so freely, are, upon every possible opportunity, recommended by the Apothecaries.

I am sorry to say, there are too many Physicians who, not having a proper sense of their duty, either towards their patients or their profession, do absolutely vie with each other for the Apothecaries favor, by such unjust and improper proceedings. It is likewise upon this ground that we may account for that reciprocity of amity, which we are often led to suppose exists between the Physician, Surgeon, and Apothecary,

cary, by the frequent panegyrics which they pass on each other's abilities, and which they strongly cement when they have a patient, by obliging each other at his expence, to the great disgrace of the profession. It often happens, that not only those who have been guilty of such scandalous practices, but the innocent and honest Practitioner is likewise involved in the contempt which a discovery of such proceedings incur; for, where-ever the Apothecaries interest can prevail (which is much too often) their principal care and aim is, to recommend such as "*write well*," and thereby cloak their unjust practices in the still farther multiplication of their *nauseous superfluities*. These are the men, according to the Apothecaries mode of thinking, who are the best and most valuable; whilst learning, judgment, and ability in the profession are but inferior pretences to practice.

Thus it is that men, very unequal to the trust

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in which they have been employed, have been introduced into respectable families, and discovered; they have poured in large quantities of medicines to no effect, and their attendance has been of little or no advantage to the sick person; but by taking the Apothecaries word, that they were the ablest of the Profession, the most disadvantageous conclusions have been made against the science of the Healing Art in general: but, however, when the world shall recover from its delusion, and the people be no longer influenced by the Apothecaries, and are willing to investigate the truth of what is here asserted, they will be convinced of the great utility of medicine skilfully directed and administered.

Pardon, my dear Sir, this long digression, and place its cause to the honest contempt which fills my breast at the delineation of such characters. I will now then, if you please, revert to the original subject.

There

There are many Apothecaries who imagine themselves authorised to practise on the basis of their learning and qualifications. These men I would recommend to stand the test which the law has appointed, and if they prove themselves equal to their professions, they will be admitted to a legal practice. Such who refuse to undergo this examination cannot think it hard if their capability for practice is doubted. The law has already appointed Examiners, whose power is not to be questioned, and if the examinations were to be rendered more strict than they are at present, it would be more for the advantage of Practitioners, as likewise for the people at large: learning, ingenuity, and industry would be distinguished, and the privileges of them would not be prostituted as they now are, to every fellow who has served seven years to wiping down the counter, and cleaning of phials.

The ill consequences which attend the presumption

sumption of so many ignorant pretenders invading the profession of Physic, Surgery, and Midwifery, is undoubtedly a public and glaring mischief, and I earnestly hope it will be thought worthy the consideration of those in whom alone is lodged the power of redressing it. I have often heard many of the Apothecaries declare, that as much knowledge is to be acquired at their shops, as at the different Medical Seminaries! No doubt, the wonderful improving opportunities of injecting an enema, or dressing a blister, are far more instructive than reading the different volumes on Physic, Surgery, &c. written by men of exquisite learning, and consummate experience, the result of long study, and many years practice! This is the mode which the regular Student pursues, but the Apothecaries have a much shorter way of acquiring knowledge; they see every day a number of prescriptions, and prefer them to their files, from whence on a sudden they become more enlightened

lightened than Hippocrates; and *repetatur* is certainly far more edifying, than whole histories of distempers, with their causes and cures.

It is clearly evident, that unless some regulation takes place, the practice of the different branches of Physic will entirely degenerate into quackery and ignorance. We will just consider what is the proper business of an Apothecary: it is to compound certain drugs according to the Physician's or Surgeon's prescription. It may happen that some of these articles may require pulverizing; but it is presumed, that beating at a mortar does not necessarily make a man learned. Or, to carry it yet farther, even to the utmost extent of this business, there is no profound reasoning required to boil water and sugar to the consistence of a syrup; or to put some few drugs or plants into an alembic, and draw over a simple or compound water. This, which is the *niciest* part of their *skill*, is performed with more
exactness

exactness by many Ladies, or their House-keepers. All the advantages they presume upon beyond these, are only, seeing eminent Practitioners prescriptions, and their Patients. The latter of these, every common Nurse has the benefit of much more than Apothecaries, as she is constantly attending, and therefore sees all the symptoms; yet no one ever appeals to her medical skill. With regard to seeing the prescriptions, while they are unqualified to judge of the intentions, and the reasons why such medicines are prescribed, it is impossible they can use them with judgment.

The compounding of medicines prescribed, and knowing *why* they are prescribed, are two different things: One is an ordinary habitual thing; the other depends upon the circumstances of the case, which cannot be properly judged of, unless by one who understands the natural history of the human body, and is acquainted
with

with the mechanism and operations of nature. These are heights of knowledge at which few Apothecaries arrive.

It is natural to expect the clamours of the Apothecaries ; that, what I have here related is merely the result of malice, from one who is in want of business ; that it is an attempt to ruin families who subsist by practising as Apothecaries. But if I have made it to appear that the practice is a cheat, contrary to law, contrary to reason, contrary to their patients healths, and contrary to the interest of their purses ; that the generality of Apothecaries sophisticate medicines ; that they frequently substitute one article for another injudiciously ; and that they make most exorbitant charges—it is hoped, that whatever they may say of me, will not influence any person to entertain an ill opinion of my veracity, for I do here avow, that if they, or any of their friends are able to contradict what I have as-

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sented,

serted, I will step forward, and publicly retract it. I therefore challenge them to shew any untruth in what I have particularly communicated, which if they do not in public, the world will have full reason to conclude, that what they vent to the contrary in private, *is false*, and receive it accordingly. As it is the nearest wish of my heart to check the vanity and presumption of these practising Apothecaries, I will here subjoin that eminent Greek Philosopher Socrates's opinion of such a being.

Socrat. If any one should come to your acquaintance Eryximachus, or to his father Acumenus, and should brag to him of his knowledge in the use of medicines ; that he could so apply them to the body, as to make it hot, or cold, when he pleased ; that he likewise knew what would vomit, or what would purge, or indeed excite any other evacuation ; and being acquainted with these things, he might surely set
up

up as a Physician, and be able also to instruct his Apprentices into the mysteries of Physic, how do you think they would answer him ?

Phædr. How should they, but by asking him whether he likewise understood to whom, or in what cases, and when, and in what proportion every one of such articles are to be given ?

Socrat. But if he should own his ignorance as to these circumstances, and should turn it off by saying, that those who will trouble themselves with these niceties, must have recourse to men who have been educated in the way of considering them ; but for his part, he perfectly understands what he told them, which he thinks fully sufficient to make any man a Physician ; what would they answer him ?

Phædr. What, but the man was certainly mad, who upon the pretence of having seen

books with *formulae*, Physicians prescriptions, or from having been present at their cures, thinks he is presently become a Physician, when for want of a proper education, he can have no true understanding of the art.

My having intruded, dear Sir, thus much on your time, certainly requires an apology; but still I cannot quit my pen, till I have noticed one or two other circumstances, which are in a manner connected with what precedes.

The science of the Healing Art consists of many parts, of which Pharmacy is one, and the most trivial; but as it is included among other subjects, which the regular bred Practitioner is obliged to study, I cannot see why Physicians and Surgeons should not universally dispense their own medicines, and which they might do without any invasion of the Apothecaries privileges, as the Acts of Parliament expressly

pressly allow it ; whereas, there is no clause in the Apothecaries Charter which gives them authority to practise.

The largeness of the Doctors and Surgeons fees seems to be a subject of general complaint ; perhaps justly. For this, then, I would wish to suggest a remedy.—I would have that the Apothecaries should confine themselves merely to compounding of medicines ; as likewise to sell them at the same prices as the Chemists, (who at this time, I do sincerely believe, make up more prescriptions than the Apothecaries) then people would convey their prescriptions to the Apothecaries in preference ; by which means the quantity of business which they would transact, would more then compensate for the reduction in the prices. Should such a plan be adopted, the Physicians and Surgeons attendance would more frequently be required, perhaps in a ratio
of

of four or six times to what it is at present; consequently, if they were to receive but a fourth or sixth part of what they receive now, as a fee, their gains would be equal in the end.

To conclude, if, notwithstanding the proofs I have given of the Apothecaries incapability to practise, people should still submit themselves to their direction, I shall think they wish to dissipate their health, and voluntarily disqualify themselves for a fulfilment of those duties which their situation in this world demands. Let them remember, that life without health is a miserable load; that the gifts of Fortune are useless, when, for want of health, we are deprived of the happiness of enjoying them. In short, without health no one is happy.

With the sincerest wishes that you may pass your life in the full enjoyment of health, and
that

that every happiness may flow towards you, in
equal tides, as benevolence and humanity stream
from your heart,

I am, Dear Sir,

Your most sincere,

And obliged humble Servant,

DISCRIMINATOR.